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A STUDY OF THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF INFIRMITIES

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
Asbury Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Religious Education

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by  
Judianne Ellen Lesniewski  
July 1969

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of the Methodist tradition, writers have written and preachers have preached about the "human element" in the life of holiness or about the "infirmities" of the sanctified believer. From John Wesley's time to the present day, attempts have been made to understand the relationship of God's sanctifying grace to human frailties. In fact, these attempts go back to the Apostle Paul in the first century A.D.

The writings of the Apostle Paul in the first century A.D. From his biography in the book of Acts, it is known that Paul experienced Christian conversion and was filled with the Holy Spirit. But evidently his spiritual experiences did not remove his "infirmities," for four times within fourteen verses in his second letter to the Corinthians<sup>1</sup> he wrote that he actually gloried in his infirmities.

If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities (11:30).

. . . yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities (12:5).

Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me (12:9).

Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities . . . for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong (12:10).

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<sup>1</sup>Biblical references are from the Authorized Version unless otherwise noted.

There was no conflict in Paul's mind between the grace of God being continually operative in his life and the persistent existence of his infirmities.

The writings of John Wesley in the eighteenth century. John Wesley (1703-1791) is considered the "father of Methodism" and the originator of the modern "holiness movement."<sup>2</sup> A study of his writings reveals that he struggled with the problem of human frailties and the Spirit's work in the crisis of sanctification. Writing about sanctified believers he said:

Yet still how weak is their understanding! How confused, how inaccurate are our apprehensions, of even the things that are around about us! . . . what wanderings of imagination, are we continually subject to! And how many are the temptations which we have to expect, even from these innocent infirmities!<sup>3</sup>

They are not perfect in knowledge. They are not free from ignorance, no, nor from mistake. We are no more to expect any living man to be infallible, than to be omniscient. They are not free from infirmities, such as weakness or slowness of understanding, irregular quickness or heaviness of imagination.<sup>4</sup>

But even these souls dwell in a shattered body. . . . For want of better bodily organs, they must at times think, speak, or act wrong; not indeed through a defect of love, but through a defect of knowledge. And while this is the case, notwithstanding that defect, and its consequences, they fulfill the law of love.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>By "holiness movement" the present writer means those denominations and independent groups who place an emphasis on sanctification as a crisis experience subsequent to regeneration.

<sup>3</sup>John Wesley, Works (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), VI, 477-78.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., XI, 374.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., XI, 419.

. . . you have this treasure in an earthen vessel; you dwell in a poor shattered house of clay, which presses down the immortal spirit. Hence all your thoughts, words, and actions are so imperfect; so far from coming up to the standard. . . .<sup>6</sup>

While fervently preaching and teaching the doctrine of perfect love, Wesley recognized that there were factors in the lives of sanctified believers which were imperfect, problem causing, and a falling short of the glory of God.

Holiness literature from the nineteenth century until 1960. One of the classics in the field of holiness literature is Daniel Steele's book, Milestone Papers, written in 1878. Early in his book Steele discussed the subject of infirmities and the distinction between them and sin.<sup>7</sup> In 1905 John A. Wood wrote Mistakes Respecting Christian Holiness. In his book he included a chapter on the distinction between "inbred sin and the innocent infirmities of human nature."<sup>8</sup>

Other authors have written entire books in this area of study. Harmon A. Baldwin wrote Holiness and the Human Element in 1919. The purpose of his book was "to show how grace does co-exist with human frailties."<sup>9</sup> In 1938 John R. Church wrote Earthen Vessels or the Human Element in Holiness. Paul S. Rees, in his introduction to Church's book,

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., XII, 278-79.

<sup>7</sup>Daniel Steele, Milestone Papers (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1966), pp. 33-40.

<sup>8</sup>John A. Wood, Mistakes Respecting Christian Holiness (Chicago: Christian Witness Company, 1905), pp. 61-63.

<sup>9</sup>Harmon A. Baldwin, Holiness and the Human Element (Chicago: Free Methodist Publishing House, 1919), p. 5.

said it was written to answer such questions as: "Is holy living compatible with our humanness and finiteness?" and "Is there a perfection which is not cancelled out by those mental and physical deficiencies and infirmities which in varying degrees menace our mortal existence to the end?"<sup>10</sup>

Many of the classic works of theology do not deal at all with the relationship of the grace of God to human infirmities. H. Orton Wiley devotes to this subject only one paragraph and a footnote in his three-volume Christian Theology (1952) wherein he makes a distinction between infirmities and sin.<sup>11</sup>

Limitations of the holiness literature from the first century A.D. until 1960. The greatest limitation of the literature mentioned in the preceding paragraphs is its lack of an understanding of the inner workings of the human personality. Man was understood by others only by means of his outward conduct; he understood himself only through his behavior and through the elements of his inner spirit of which he was consciously aware. Thus, man's understanding of himself was at best only surface deep.

Those characteristics which man did not understand, because they were below the level of conscious awareness, and which did not conform to

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<sup>10</sup>Paul S. Rees, in the "Introduction" to John R. Church, Earthen Vessels or the Human Element in Holiness (Winston Salem, N.C.: n.p., 1938), p. 4.

<sup>11</sup>H. Orton Wiley, Christian Theology (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1952), II, 507-9.

the ideal standard of what he should be, were all grouped together and called "infirmities." These were discussed as though they had an existence all their own, objective and separate from the other parts of personality. There was little sense of the continuity between a man's past experiences and his infirmities. However, these early holiness writers did realize that there was something in one's personality which affected his attempts to live a holy life and to express the love of God through his life. These writers struggled with this problem and did the best they could to provide an answer without having the benefits of the insights of modern psychology, especially its insights into the subconscious and unconscious areas of personality.

The Apostle Paul, the first of the writers presently under consideration, realized that "we have this treasure in earthen vessels" (II Cor. 4:7). He also spoke of his "infirmities" which remained even after his crisis spiritual experiences. However, nowhere did he give a definitive statement as to what he meant by infirmities or as to what influence the Christian's "earthen vessel" had upon his attempts to live a holy life and upon his desire to express the love of God through his life.

John Wesley made a great contribution to the understanding of the human element in the living of a sanctified life. His recognition of the human limits in the life of perfect love and his distinction between perfection in love and perfection in performance and knowledge are parts of his theology which need renewed emphasis in the holiness movement of today. However, Wesley's understanding of infirmities was

largely limited to a discussion of the effects that resulted from them. He did not discuss the actual nature of infirmities, their origin and present dynamic influence upon the individual; neither did he talk of the therapeutic relationship of God's grace to the Christian's infirmities.

Wesley wrote, "How confused, how inaccurate are our apprehensions, of even the things that are around about us!"<sup>12</sup> Even so, he did not discuss the causes of man's confused, inaccurate apprehensions or what can be done to lessen their hampering effect upon his life. Neither did he explain why each person interprets social situations in different ways, depending upon his particular personality and inner needs.

Imperfections of knowledge and of the body itself were other infirmities which Wesley discussed in his Works. The sanctified believer is not free from ignorance, mistakes, weakness or slowness of understanding, irregular quickness or heaviness of imagination. Nor does he live in a perfect body. Because of his "poor, shattered house of clay, which presses down the immortal spirit," all of his "thoughts, words, and actions are so imperfect; so far from coming up to the standard."<sup>13</sup> It would seem that Wesley was a man of his times in that he attributed every expression of the person to his body, his physical makeup. Wrong thinking, speaking, and acting were the results of an imperfect body, he said. In this matter Wesley presented a picture of

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<sup>12</sup>Wesley, Works, VI, 477-78.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., XII, 278-79.

personality which is now outdated. Today both those who are trained in the discipline of psychology and the man-on-the-street realize that man has a psychological nature as well as a physical nature. It is the psychological realm of man's being which produces his thoughts, words, and actions.

Therefore, though Wesley dealt with the problem of humanity and holiness, yet he left much ground to be covered. In light of modern man's understanding of himself and his fellow man, Wesley's answers appear too simple and too shallow.

A century after Wesley, holiness writers were still struggling with the factor of infirmities in sanctified believers. Their answers were as elusive as those of Wesley. Daniel Steele in 1878 wrote that infirmities were different from sins in that they were "an involuntary outflow from our imperfect moral organization" having their source "in our physical nature . . . aggravated by intellectual deficiencies."<sup>14</sup> Steele was like Wesley in his misunderstanding of the relationship between man's physical nature and his infirmities. He seems to have understood infirmities as being physiological in origin and intensified by impaired intellectual faculties. Nothing was said about their psychological nature and origin.

The holiness writers from 1900 until 1960, with the increased psychological knowledge available to them, have made some advances in understanding the origin and nature of human infirmities and in under-

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<sup>14</sup>Steele, Milestone Papers, p. 34.



standing the relationship between these infirmities and the work of the Holy Spirit. Harmon A. Baldwin's book, Holiness and the Human Element, opened the way to increased interest and study of the human element in the life of holiness.

Baldwin discussed the subject of infirmities in four chapters of his book. His other chapters dealt with such human weaknesses as discouragement, ecstatic feelings, righteous indignation, feelings, nerves, fear, and worry. All of these could be classified as infirmities, also, although Baldwin did not include them in his chapters on infirmities.

In his chapter on "mental infirmities" in sanctified believers,<sup>15</sup> Baldwin discussed what today would be called "psychological" or "emotional" infirmities rather than the present-day meaning of "mental" as that which relates to the mind and the intellect. He had some insight into the nature of human personality and made a valuable contribution to the understanding of holiness and humanity. His understanding of the human element in holiness went deeper than that of previous writers. He wrote about the differences in personality, the peculiarities, and the varying dispositions of sanctified believers and how these factors cause different people to act in different ways even after being sanctified.

Baldwin's work, however, is limited in its helpfulness because the discipline of psychology was still a relatively young discipline at the

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<sup>15</sup>Baldwin, Holiness and the Human Element, pp. 94-105.

time of its writing. Consequently, it does not go deep enough into the actual nature of infirmities and of human personality; nor does it discuss the possibility of healing of these infirmities.

John R. Church's book, Earthen Vessels or the Human Element in Holiness, is good as far as it goes; but it is neither scholarly nor thorough. Much of its terminology is outdated and would reach only a limited number of people who were used to his religious vocabulary. His book is quite repetitive and gives only a brief treatment of the various human traits, characteristics, and desires which remain after the crisis of sanctification. About all Church did say is that these traits and desires do remain after sanctification and that the "carnal" element in them is taken out. Among the characteristics which he calls "humanity" are the desire for food and sex, pride, ambition, and the individual's natural temperament which might be either slow and quiet or high-strung and quick. He included no discussion of the underlying factors of these traits; neither did he indicate what kind of help is available to lessen the negative effect of the Christian's humanity upon his attempts to live a holy life.

However, Church's book is significant in that he indicated a number of errors in the thinking of holiness people, thus helping to create a more realistic understanding of the doctrine of sanctification. Among the errors which he discussed are those resulting from a failure to distinguish between "carnality" and "humanity," temptation and sin, and purity and maturity. He pointed out that a sanctified believer is tempted after his crisis experience of sanctification and that it is possible for a sanctified believer to sin.

Each of the writers discussed so far have indicated that there are infirmities present in the lives of Christians who have been sanctified. To these writers there was no inconsistency in the coexistence of God's sanctifying grace in the heart of the Christian and of infirmities in the personality of the Christian. Sanctification to them was not a great de-humanizing experience; nor was it the means whereby the Christian gained a perfect personality which enabled him to perform perfectly. These early holiness authors were honest enough to recognize the fact that Christians are not freed from their infirmities by a crisis experience of sanctification, but that was as far as they could go in understanding the relationship of humanity to holiness. They did not help the Christian to understand the origin and nature of his infirmities and what the grace of God is able to do for him at the point of his infirmities. Both psychologically and biblically these early writers left much to be discussed.

Holiness literature since 1960. During the years since 1960, there has developed a wide-spread renewal of interest in the subject of the human element in holiness. A demand is being made for a post-crisis theology which deals not so much with the initial crisis experience of sanctification, but rather with the ongoing process of the work of the Holy Spirit within the sanctified believer. A number of contemporary writers have begun to meet this challenge.

William S. Deal's Problems of the Spirit-filled Life (1961) is largely a discussion focusing on the problems a sanctified person faces

because of his humanity. Some of the chapters in his book are: "Difficulties Arising From Faults," "Understanding Our Infirmities," and "Distinguishing Between Human and Carnal Traits."<sup>16</sup>

W. Curry Mavis, in chapter five of his book, The Psychology of Christian Experience (1963), discussed the "maladjustive impulses" which are a part of the believer's personality and which remain after his crisis experience of sanctification.<sup>17</sup> Mavis is a pioneer in the area of defining in psychological terms what the earlier holiness writers simply called "infirmities" or "humanity."

Each of the three books which have been edited by Kenneth Geiger for the National Holiness Association and which are collections of papers read at their study seminars in 1961, 1962, and 1964, included chapters dealing with the human element in holiness. In the 1961 volume, Insights into Holiness, Roy S. Nicholson wrote a chapter on "Holiness and the Human Element."<sup>18</sup> Further Insights into Holiness, which is the 1962 volume, included chapters on "Areas of Growth After Sanctification" by Otho Jennings,<sup>19</sup> "The Imperfections of the Perfect"

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<sup>16</sup>William S. Deal, Problems of the Spirit-filled Life (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1961), pp. 67-69, 79-89, 107-16.

<sup>17</sup>W. Curry Mavis, The Psychology of Christian Experience (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963), pp. 59-72.

<sup>18</sup>Roy S. Nicholson, "Holiness and the Human Element," Insights into Holiness, Kenneth Geiger, editor (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1962), pp. 145-71.

<sup>19</sup>Otho Jennings, "Areas of Growth After Sanctification," Further Insights into Holiness, Kenneth Geiger, editor (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1963), pp. 141-60.

by Leo G. Cox,<sup>20</sup> and "Holiness and Nervous Reactions" by Lewis T. Corlett.<sup>21</sup> In the 1964 volume, The Word and the Doctrine, W. Curry Mavis wrote a chapter on "Repressed Complexes and Christian Maturity."<sup>22</sup> There are also several chapters in each of these books which treat more briefly the subject of the human element in holiness.

The holiness writers since 1960 have contributed much to the understanding of the human element in the life of holiness. One of the main areas of research in the present day holiness movement continues to be the relationship between holy-ness and human-ness. This is in keeping with the concern of writers throughout the history of the holiness movement. Both the early holiness writers and the holiness writers of today searched for a realistic, true-to-actual-experience understanding of the doctrine and experience of sanctification in light of the human element.

The present study in historical perspective. The two major weaknesses of the holiness literature which has been discussed are its neglect (1) to establish a biblical foundation for the study of the relationship between man's infirmities and the living of a holy life and

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<sup>20</sup>Leo G. Cox, "The Imperfections of the Perfect," Further Insights into Holiness, Kenneth Geiger, editor (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1963), pp. 179-95.

<sup>21</sup>Lewis T. Corlett, "Holiness and Nervous Reactions," Further Insights into Holiness, Kenneth Geiger, editor (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1963), pp. 333-49.

<sup>22</sup>W. Curry Mavis, "Repressed Complexes and Christian Maturity," The Word and the Doctrine, Kenneth Geiger, editor (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1965), pp. 307-15.

(2) to apply the insights of psychology to this area of study. The writers under consideration recognized the fact that infirmities do remain after a Christian experiences the crisis of sanctification. However, merely recognizing a fact is not the same as knowing how to cope with that fact.

David A. Seamands has said: "One of the most neglected areas of study in the holiness movement is that of the relationship between the deep personality problems of the Christian and the work of the Holy Spirit."<sup>23</sup> In other words, the fact that the sanctified Christian does have infirmities is recognized as a fact. However, how he is to deal with these infirmities has not been adequately discussed in the historical writings of the holiness movement.

The reason for the vague and incomplete discussions by the historical holiness writers is their failure to provide a biblical foundation for the study of holiness and humanity. Any future study in this area needs to be based upon the biblical teachings regarding the Christian's infirmities and the purposes and grace of God. There can be no valid application of any extra-biblical knowledge to the problem of the human element in holiness unless first of all it can be established that God is concerned about man's infirmities and that His grace is operative in this area of man's life.

The present study is intended to provide a biblical foundation for the study of the relationship between the Christian's infirmities

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<sup>23</sup>David A. Seamands, "Deliverance From Damaged Emotions" (Wilmore, Ky., February 6, 1966), p. 1. (Mimeographed.)

and his attempts to live a holy life and thereby to express the love of God through his personality. Unless a Christian is convinced that the Bible teaches that God is concerned about his infirmities and that His grace can do something helpful for him in this area of his life, he will be frustrated not only in his attempts to live a holy life in spite of his infirmities, but also in his search for help from extra-biblical sources.

The purpose of the present study, therefore, is to examine the biblical understanding of the concept of infirmities in order to provide a biblical foundation for future study of the relationship between a Christian's infirmities and the work of the Holy Spirit in his life. A discussion of the contributions which extra-biblical disciplines, such as psychology, can make to the study of the human element in holiness is beyond the scope of the present study.

## CHAPTER II

### A STUDY OF THE CONCEPT OF INFIRMITIES IN LEVITICUS 21:16-23

The Jewish idea of religion can be summed up in three words: access to God. The entire Jewish system of religious ritual as it developed during the centuries prior to Christ's coming can be understood in this light. All of life for the Jewish people centered around their attempt to draw near to God. The hang-up occurred at the point of their sins and infirmities. How could they, sinful and imperfect, draw near to a holy, perfect God?

In the Old Testament God taught His chosen people through symbolism and object lessons. He dictated to them an elaborate pattern of ritual by which the problem of their sins and imperfections could be taken care of, thereby clearing the way for them to draw close to Him. Within this ritual the priesthood demonstrates God's intention to do something helpful in man by providing a way to remove all that hinders man from having access to Him. Not only did the Jews want to get near to God, but God Himself wanted man close to Him.

In the present chapter a study is made of what may well be considered the central theme which runs through the entire Bible, namely, the dynamic tension between man's desire for access to God and his own sins and infirmities which thwart his attempts at getting close to God. As God's perfect plan of redemption unfolded down through the annals of man's history, each new revelation of God and man's relationship to Him



built upon the revelations that went before it. The New Testament both built upon and fulfilled the Old Testament. Christ Himself said that He had come not to abolish, but to complete, the Law and the Prophets (Mt. 5:17). Therefore, to comprehend fully the ministry of Christ, one needs to understand the Jewish thought-patterns and practices which foreshadowed the coming of the Messiah and which provide the mental frame of reference with which he can grasp the significance of all Christ did for man.

Access to God conditional. All through the Old Testament God was trying to get through to His people that He was holy and of too pure eyes to behold unholiness. Isaiah told the people that their iniquities (the sinfulness within them) separated them from their God (Is. 59:2). According to the Levitical Code of Holiness (Lev. 17-26), their infirmities also separated them from having access to God. Even though a man was a member of the priestly family, nonetheless if he had an infirmity he could not function as a priest.<sup>1</sup> Since the responsibility of a priest was to get close to God in behalf of the people, he had to be free of blemishes (infirmities, impediments) before he was qualified to enter the presence of a perfect God.

As was previously stated, religion to the Jewish people can be summarized in terms of their search for access to God. The condition

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<sup>1</sup>Nathaniel Micklem, The Book of Leviticus (Vol. II of The Interpreter's Bible, ed. George Arthur Buttrick. 12 vols.; New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1951), p. 106.

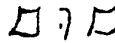
of access was "cleansing from sin and defilement";<sup>2</sup> the way of access was the priest; the ground or means of access was the offering. Chapters 21 and 22 of Leviticus emphasize the fact that only men without infirmities could serve as priests and that only offerings which were without blemish could be used in their religious sacrifices.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, if the way and the means of access to God had to be characterized by freedom from infirmities, it was also necessary for the condition of access to God to be free from infirmities.

Throughout the book of Leviticus, God kept telling the Jews that nothing unclean or unholy or imperfect was acceptable to Him. The elaborate list of clean and unclean animals and situations is of little interest to modern man, but the Jew lived during an earlier period of man's history and needed these object lessons to help him begin to grasp the intangible, abstract realities which they were meant to illustrate.

How, then, could a man ever hope to get close to God if his sins and infirmities were not permissible in God's presence? It was out of this dilemma that the priesthood arose. "The institution of the office [of the priesthood] was God's gracious provision for a people at a

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<sup>2</sup>A. B. Simpson, Leviticus (Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications, n.d.), p. 50.

<sup>3</sup>The Jerusalem Bible translates the Hebrew word  as "infirmity" when it is used in connection with man and as "blemish" when it is used in reference to animals.

distance from Him who needed one to appear in the Divine presence in their behalf."<sup>4</sup>

Access to God possible through a mediator. Since man cannot get close to God because of his imperfections, his heart longs for "one who has liberty of access to God, and whose ministry is acceptable"<sup>5</sup> so that he can intervene and intercede for him. Vitringa wrote:

The prerogative [of access to God in the Holy of Holies] held by him [the high priest] belonged to the whole of them (Ex. 19:6), but on this account it was transferred to him because it was impossible that all Israelites should keep themselves holy as became the priests of Jeh[ovah].<sup>6</sup>

Although it was possible for one man to become acceptable enough to enter the presence of God in the Holy of Holies, yet he was able to do so only once a year. Any and all imperfections in man must be quite a serious matter if they prevented the Jews from entering God's presence at all and permitted the high priest to enter only once a year.

Adam Clarke said that "in the service of God, according to the law, neither an imperfect offering nor an imperfect offerer could be admitted."<sup>7</sup> Therefore, some way had to be found to enter the presence

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<sup>4</sup>William G. Moorehead, "Priest," The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, James Orr, editor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), IV, 2439.

<sup>5</sup>William G. Moorehead, "Priesthood," The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, James Orr, editor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), IV, 2445.

<sup>6</sup>Vitringa, quoted by Moorehead, "Priest," p. 2439.

<sup>7</sup>Adam Clarke, Commentary on the Holy Bible (One-volume edition abridged by Ralph Earle; Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1967), p. 171.

of God. According to William G. Moorehead, "it was in virtue of the priestly functions that the chosen people were brought into near relations with God and kept therein."<sup>8</sup>

Without a mediator, then, man could not hope to draw near to God at all. His hope of contact with God lay in the person of the priest "through whom and through whose ministry people draw near to God, through whom they are 'sanctified'; that is, made a people of God, and enabled to worship."<sup>9</sup> When the high priest "carried the breastplate with the names of the tribes inscribed thereon he acted as mediator between Israel and God (Ex. 28:29)."<sup>10</sup>

The Levitical concept of infirmities as discussed by commentators.

To illustrate the fact that man could not have access to God while still sinful and imperfect, the priest had to be without infirmity if he were to get close to God. Then as he was able to enter God's presence, he did so as the representative of the people and as their mediator who was to bring them into contact with God.

The Dictionary of the Bible, edited by James Hastings, states that "full priestly rights belong to such Aaronites as are free from bodily defects. No one who suffers from any such blemish is to go

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<sup>8</sup>Moorehead, "Priest," p. 2439.

<sup>9</sup>J. Denney, "Priest in NT," Dictionary of the Bible, James Hastings, editor (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), IV, 98.

<sup>10</sup>James Josiah Reeve, "Priest, High," The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, James Orr, editor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), IV, 2442.

within the sanctuary or approach the altar."<sup>11</sup> The Interpreter's Bible refers to the list of physical infirmities in Leviticus 21:16-21 as "impediments" which hinder a member of the priestly family from exercising the priestly office, though he still could share in the part of the sacrifices which the priests received.<sup>12</sup> Dennis F. Kinlaw stressed the fact that the priests "must be without physical defect."<sup>13</sup> These are but a few of the commentators and writers who equate the Hebrew word קִטְרָן in Leviticus 21 and 22 with physical infirmities.

Since the high priest was the one priest who could enter into the Holy of Holies, and thus have access to God, then he above all the rest needed to be free of infirmities. William G. Moorehead, writing in The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, described the high priest as needing to be physically perfect, without any defect or deformity.<sup>14</sup> James Josiah Reeve, writing in the same encyclopedia, regarded the office of the high priest as being so important as to require special regulations. Among these was the requirement that he "be free from every bodily defect."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Wolf Baudissin, "Priests and Levites," Dictionary of the Bible, James Hastings, editor (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), IV, 83.

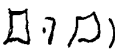
<sup>12</sup>Micklem, Leviticus, p. 106.

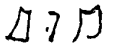
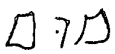
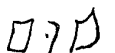
<sup>13</sup>Dennis F. Kinlaw, "Old Testament Roots of the Wesleyan Message," Further Insights into Holiness, Kenneth Geiger, editor (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1963), p. 48.

<sup>14</sup>Moorehead, "Priest," p. 2440.

<sup>15</sup>Reeve, loc. cit.

These several writers have emphasized the fact that access to God was possible for the Jews only by a mediator who was free of physical infirmities. Since the entire religious system of the Jews was put in terms of external, objectified realities, it is not surprising that they understood infirmities to mean physical, bodily defects. Only as the history of mankind unfolded and man grew out of childhood and adolescence into adulthood could he begin to comprehend spiritual truths in nontangible, internal concepts.

An examination of the Hebrew word for "infirmities." The Hebrew word (  ) which the Jerusalem Bible translates as "infirmities" (in reference to man) and "blemishes" (in reference to animals) is translated in the Authorized Version as "blemish" (16 times), "blot" (2 times), and "spot" (3 times).<sup>16</sup>

The following are some of the translations given for  in Hebrew lexicons: spot, blemish, defect, want, fault, (moral) stain, failure. Gesenius, Davies, and Brown, Driver, and Briggs state that  was used to refer to both physical and moral infirmities, though not necessarily referring to both at the same time. In the "Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary" at the end of Strong's Concordance, the author said that  came from an unused root which probably

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<sup>16</sup>Robert Young, "Index-Lexicon to the Old Testament," Analytical Concordance to the Bible (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1955), p. 28.

meant "to stain."<sup>17</sup> Then from this developed the usage of the word for "a blemish (physical or moral)."<sup>18</sup>

Brown, Driver, and Briggs seem to concur with Strong in that the figurative meaning they give for  $\square \cdot \eta \cdot \eta$  is "moral stain."<sup>19</sup> Though it also means "physical defect," they feel the usual meaning is that of "moral stain."<sup>20</sup> Davies defines  $\square \cdot \eta \cdot \eta$  as "failure, defect" and states that it can be either physical (Dan. 1:4) or moral (Job 31:7).<sup>21</sup> Gesenius, using these scriptural references, makes the same distinction.<sup>22</sup> He says that the word means "a spot, blemish" and can be either "physically of an corporeal blemish" as in Leviticus 21, 22, 24, or "morally" as in Deuteronomy 32:5, Job 11:15, 31:7, and Proverbs 9:7.<sup>23</sup> According to II Samuel 14:25 and the Song of Solomon 4:7, "it was essential to personal beauty to be without blemish."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>James Strong, "Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary," Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1890), p. 60.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 548.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Benjamin Davies (ed.), A Compendious and Complete Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), p. 330.

<sup>22</sup>William Gesenius, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (eleventh edition; Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1860), pp. 530, 546.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 546.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

Davies defines  $\Delta\eta\delta$  as "a want or defect, hence a blemish or fault."<sup>25</sup> These can be either of the body (Lev. 21:17) or of the mind (Deut. 32:5; cf. Job 11:15).<sup>26</sup> He says that the word came from an obsolete form which was akin to another word meaning "to lack, be defective."<sup>27</sup> Davies, as well as Gesenius, notes that the Greek word for  $\Delta\eta\delta$  is  $\mu\hat{\omega}\mu\omicron\varsigma$ .<sup>28</sup>

Thus, it can be seen that in Leviticus  $\Delta\eta\delta$  is used to refer to a physical defect or lack, some infirmity in a person's physiology or physical appearance. However, though this is the meaning of  $\Delta\eta\delta$  in Leviticus, it still carries with it the possibility of a figurative meaning of moral defects or infirmities. As will be seen in later chapters, it was as the moral consciousness of man increased that the figurative meaning of  $\Delta\eta\delta$  became clearer.

An examination of the Septuagint word for "infirmities." The Greek word for  $\Delta\eta\delta$  in the Septuagint is  $\mu\hat{\omega}\mu\omicron\varsigma$ , which is the same word that Davies and Gesenius equate with  $\Delta\eta\delta$ . The dual meaning of the Hebrew word is seen again in the Greek equivalent. Arndt and Gingrich define  $\mu\hat{\omega}\mu\omicron\varsigma$  as (1) "blame" and (2) "defect, blemish (bodily and also moral)."<sup>29</sup> It is interesting to note that

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<sup>25</sup>Davies, op. cit., p. 340.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 533.



the definition as "bodily defect" is given for passages in the Old Testament (verses in Leviticus), while the meaning of "moral defect" is used for the teachers of error in the New Testament (II Pet. 2:13). Here again one can recognize the maturing capacity of man to see beyond the external, physical world and grasp the unseen realities which the physical world was meant to symbolize.

F. Hauck, in Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, gave a thorough discussion of the Septuagint usage of  $\mu\hat{\omega}\mu\omicron\varsigma$ . The classical meaning is that of "reproach, ignominy." The Old Testament uses this meaning in reference to physical blemishes (II Sam. 14:25; Dan. 1:4; Cant. 4:7), but then it goes further and borders on the second meaning given to  $\mu\hat{\omega}\mu\omicron\varsigma$ . The Septuagint translators chose  $\mu\hat{\omega}\mu\omicron\varsigma$  for the Hebrew  $\text{בִּלְבָּב}$  because of the affinity of sound in the pronunciation of the two words. Hauck wrote:

In the LXX, then,  $\mu\hat{\omega}\mu\omicron\varsigma$  takes on the first sense and becomes something which it is not in class[ical] Gr[reek], namely, an important cultic term. Freedom from physical blemish is a cultic demand in the priest (Lev. 21:16ff) and the offering (Lev. 22:20).<sup>30</sup>

When Philo speaks of the cultic perfection required of sacrifices and of moral perfection, he uses  $\mu\hat{\omega}\mu\omicron\varsigma$ .<sup>31</sup> He also uses the negative form of the word,  $\acute{\alpha}\mu\hat{\omega}\mu\omicron\varsigma$ , with the same dual meaning. Both "the cultic perfection of the offering" and "the blamelessness of

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<sup>30</sup>F. Hauck, " $\mu\hat{\omega}\mu\omicron\varsigma$ ,  $\acute{\alpha}\mu\hat{\omega}\mu\omicron\varsigma$ ,  $\acute{\alpha}\mu\acute{\omega}\mu\eta\tau\omicron\varsigma$ ," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Gerhard Kittel, editor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), IV, 830.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

the righteous before God" are referred to as ἀμώμος, i.e., "without blemish, without reproach, blameless."<sup>32</sup> The latter usage is a spiritualizing of the cultic concept of physical perfection.

The negative form of μῶμος is ἀμώμος. Though the usage of this word in the New Testament is in reference to "perfect moral and religious piety" and carries with it the meaning of "one who is without reproach (either physically or morally), one who is blameless,"<sup>33</sup> yet in the Old Testament the moral connotation is absent.

Hauck amplifies this idea when he wrote:

In the LXX, however, ἀμώμος is most commonly used by far for physical perfection as a presupposition of cultic use, e.g., of the offering--a use alien to class[ical] Gr[reek] . . . or the priest who is qualified to perform the most sacred actions by his most stringent fulfilment of the Law.<sup>34</sup>

As has been stated previously, the Jews were not able to grasp abstract concepts without the aid of symbols and object lessons. Hauck further confirms this fact in discussing the New Testament usage of

ἀμώμος. He wrote:

The image of sacrifices without blemish is used in I Pt. 1:19 . . . and Hb. 9:14 . . . But, in both cases, in accordance with the total character of NT religion, the statement is on the moral and religious plane rather than the ritual and cultic. The OT demand that sacrifices be without physical blemish finds its NT fulfilment in the perfect moral blamelessness (Hb. 4:15, 7:26) of the Redeemer who sacrifices Himself.<sup>35</sup>

Conclusion. In the Old Testament the great concern of the Jewish people was how to get close to God. Since God was holy and perfect,

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 831.

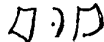
<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 830-31.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

their sins and imperfections created a barrier between them and God. It was only through the institution of the priesthood and its provision of an acceptable mediator for the people that they could overcome this barrier.

Since the concept of infirmities in Leviticus is that of bodily imperfections, the priestly mediator had to be free of all physical defects. In this sense he was considered "perfect" and could serve in the capacity of a mediator. He then was able to approach God in behalf of the people, and the people were able to get near God through him.

However, though  , i.e., infirmities, in Leviticus 21:16-23 refers to physical imperfections, yet it carries with it the possibility of a figurative meaning. As will be seen in later chapters, this possibility became more evident as the moral consciousness of man increased and as he was able to think in abstract concepts and not merely in physical terms.

### CHAPTER III

#### A STUDY OF THE CONCEPT OF INFIRMITIES

##### IN HEBREWS 5:2, 7:28, AND 4:15

The Epistle to the Hebrews was written to Christians who were thoroughly familiar with the Levitical priesthood and God's demand for perfection. Therefore, the next step in understanding the biblical concept of infirmities will be a study of this concept in the New Testament book which is the one most closely related to the Old Testament book of Leviticus.

The Greek word for infirmities which is used in Hebrews 4:15, 5:2, and 7:28 is ἀσθένεια . In order to comprehend the significance of these verses and their relationship to the concept of infirmities in Leviticus 21:16-23, it is first necessary to understand the New Testament meaning of this Greek noun. Then the connection between Leviticus and the Epistle to the Hebrews can be examined.

An examination of the Greek word for "infirmities." ἀσθένεια is composed of ἄ , which denotes privation when used in composition,<sup>1</sup> and σθένος , meaning "strength."<sup>2</sup> Literally it signifies "want of

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<sup>1</sup>The Analytical Greek Lexicon (New York: Harper & Brothers, n.d.), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>W. E. Vine, An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words (Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1940), p. 490.

strength" and is translated in the New Testament most frequently as "infirmity" and "infirmities."<sup>3</sup> According to Kittel's Theological Dictionary, it refers to "weakness" of different kinds.<sup>4</sup>

Although ἀσθένεια was used originally in the physical sense, it is hardly ever used in this way in the New Testament.<sup>5</sup>

Cremer says that ἀσθένεια as used in biblical Greek denotes:

the weakening of the life-power proceeding from the σὰρξ [i.e., the physical nature of man], and again showing itself therein; the weakening of the divine life-principle in all its manifestations metaphysically, morally, and intellectually [cf. Heb. 7:28; II Cor. 13:4] . . . It is just herein that the peculiar import of the human ἀσθένεια consists, and its closer though not necessarily causative connection with sin [cf. Heb. 4:15, 5:2,3]. As ἀσθένεια τῆς σαρκός, it is the judicial consequence of sin, and in the issue it is in turn the cause of it, but at the same time it gives to sin a distinctive character; comp. ἀγνοέω, ἀγνοία.<sup>6</sup>

The two words which Cremer suggests as having an affinity to ἀσθένεια are used to refer to conduct which is "not the result of previous conscious thought"<sup>7</sup> and in which the person's "consciousness is passive, not active, in relation to sin."<sup>8</sup> The nominal form that is created by adding -μα, which indicates result or the thing itself,<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Gustav Stahlin, "ἀσθενής, ἀσθένεια, ἀσθενέω, ἀσθένημα," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Gerhard Kittel, editor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), IV, 830.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 491.

<sup>6</sup>Hermann Cremer, Biblico-theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek (fourth edition with supplement; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895), p. 526.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>J. Harold Greenlee, A Concise Exegetical Grammar of New Testament Greek (third edition; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), p. 19.

sheds further light on the meaning of these words. Cremer writes:

According to the analogy of Scripture, it denotes not only conscious sin, but generally all sin wherein consciousness is passive,--sin which perhaps may enter into consciousness, but which does not proceed from consciousness, cf. Heb. v. 2 . . . Heb. ix. 7.<sup>10</sup>

The "closer though not necessarily causative connection" between infirmities and sin, as seen by Cremer, appears to be in the area of personal responsibility or willfulness. There seems to be an unintentional, non-conscious proclivity to sin in ἀσθένεια.

Vincent supports this view by saying that infirmities are "not sufferings, but weaknesses, moral and physical, which predispose to sin and facilitate it."<sup>11</sup> Wuest agrees and adds that these are "the weaknesses which undermine our resistance to temptation and make it difficult for us to keep from sinning."<sup>12</sup> Thayer says that when this word is used to refer to the soul, it indicates a "want of the strength and capacity requisite . . . to restrain corrupt desires," which leads to a "proclivity to sin: Heb. v. 2; vii. 28."<sup>13</sup> It can also indicate "want of the strength and capacity requisite . . . to bear trials and troubles: Ro. viii. 26 . . . 2 Co. xi. 30,"<sup>14</sup> as well as referring to

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<sup>10</sup>Cremer, loc. cit.

<sup>11</sup>M. R. Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), IV, 430.

<sup>12</sup>Kenneth S. Wuest, Hebrews in the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), pp. 94-95.

<sup>13</sup>Joseph Henry Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (New York: American Book Company, 1889), p. 80.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

"the mental [?] [sic] states in which this weakness manifests itself:  
2 Co. xii. 5,9."<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, it would seem that ἀσθένεια "denotes a quality of human nature"<sup>16</sup> which is less than perfect and thereby inclined to both conscious and non-conscious motivation to sin.

The significance of the Greek word for "infirmities" in Hebrews 5:2 and 7:28. In these two verses the high priest in the Old Testament is said to have had ἀσθένεια, i.e., infirmities. However, even though he had ἀσθένεια, yet he still was considered fit to offer sacrifices and to enter the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement once a year. In fact, it would seem that it was due to his ἀσθένεια that he had to make an offering for his sins as well as for the people. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews (5:2,3) wrote:

Who [i.e., "every high priest" in 5:1] can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins.

Here again emphasis is made upon the "closer though not necessarily causative connection"<sup>17</sup> between infirmities and sin, as well as the "proclivity to sin"<sup>18</sup> which is inherent in infirmities. Moffatt states: "strictly speaking, only such sins could be pardoned (Lv 4<sup>2</sup>, 5<sup>21</sup>. 22,

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Cremer, Lexicon, p. 527.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>18</sup>Thayer, loc. cit.

Nu 15<sup>22-31</sup>, Dt 17<sup>12</sup>) as were unintentional. Wilful sins were not covered by the ordinary ritual of sacrifice (10<sup>26</sup>, cp. Nu 12<sup>11</sup>).<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, because the high priest shared in the common infirmity or "liability to temptation"<sup>20</sup> of the people he represented, he was able to deal gently with those "who sin through yielding to the weaknesses of human nature."<sup>21</sup>

Although a man was a high priest, yet he was still subjected to the inner infirmities which are common to all men and which predispose men to sin, though these infirmities are not sin in themselves.

The significance of the Greek word for "infirmities" in Hebrews 4:15. Not only was the high priest in the Old Testament afflicted with *ἀσθενεία*, but all men of all times also have had to cope with their infirmities. The hopeful message of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews is that, though man is troubled with infirmities, yet there is One who understands and is willing to enter into man's plight. He came not only to atone for man's sins, but also to be "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

Wuest describes the nature of Christ's temptations in this manner:

He has felt in His own consciousness, the difficulty of being righteous in this world; has felt pressing upon Him the reasons and inducements that incline men to choose sin that they may

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<sup>19</sup>James Moffatt, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews (in The International Critical Commentary, ed. S. R. Driver, A. Plummer, and C. A. Briggs. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1924), p. 63.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.



escape suffering and death; in every part of His human constitution has known the pain and conflict with which alone temptation can be overcome . . . His temptation was true and could only be overcome by means that are open to all. The only difference between our temptations and those of Jesus is that His were without sin.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, because Christ experienced the same conflicts that man faces due to his infirmities, man can "come boldly unto the throne of grace that [he] may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). Man's boldness is a result of his knowing that Christ, as his high priest, can be "touched with the feeling of [his] infirmities" (Heb. 4:15), that is, with the distress and tension that his infirmities cause him.

The relationship of Leviticus 21:16-23 to Hebrews 5:2 and 7:28.

In chapter II the fact was emphasized that the priests in the Old Testament had to be without physical infirmities in order to carry out the functions of the priesthood. The high priest had to be both physically and ceremonially perfect, without infirmities, before he could enter into the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement. It was also stressed that in Leviticus 21:16-23 the Old Testament concept of infirmities was physical. It was only after man was able to think in abstract, as well as concrete, terms that he was able to comprehend the fact that though without physical infirmities, yet the high priest did have infirmities of another kind, namely ἀσθενεία. Thomas Charles Edwards, writing in The Expositor's Bible, discusses the development of man's understanding in this way:

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<sup>22</sup>Wuest, Hebrews, p. 95.

The high-priest under the Law is himself beset by the infirmities of sinful human nature, the infirmities at least for which alone the Law provides a sacrifice, sins of ignorance and inadvertence . . . The thought wears the appearance of novelty. No use is apparently made of it in the Old Testament.<sup>23</sup>

In the Old Testament the emphasis was so completely on God's demand for the high priest to be perfectly free of all physical infirmities in order to gain entrance into His presence that the fact of the high priest's humanity was forced into the background. Now that the Jews were able to understand more of the abstract, spiritual realities behind their elaborate religious ritual, the writer to the Hebrews told them that the high priest was able to effectively intercede for them only because he himself struggled with the same problems of proclivity to willful and unintentional sins. However, "the very infirmity that gave the high-priest his power of sympathy made sacrifice necessary for the high-priest himself. This was the fatal defect. How can he bestow forgiveness who must seek the like forgiveness?"<sup>24</sup> Nairne agrees that "the law of Moses . . . appoints mortal men to be priests, with an inherent weakness, that repeatedly saps their priesthood."<sup>25</sup>

The relationship of Leviticus 21:16-23 to Hebrews 4:15. Nairne views the Levitical religious system as an analogy and a source of

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<sup>23</sup>Thomas Charles Edwards, The Epistle to the Hebrews (in The Expositor's Bible, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll. Fourth edition; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1888), pp. 74-75.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>A. Nairne, The Epistle to the Hebrews (in The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921), p. 54.

vocabulary and pictorial terms for the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews to use as he tried to teach the Jews about Christ and about Christianity. He says that "the analogy of priesthood [is used] to explain the Person and the Work of Christ."<sup>26</sup> It is as though the writer to the Hebrews is saying: "Think of Him as a priest and I can make you understand."<sup>27</sup> It was as a high priest that Christ entered into the true Holy of Holies, the heavens, and into the actual presence of God, thereby gaining for men "unimpeded access to the presence of God."<sup>28</sup> Now man can approach the throne of grace boldly; he can draw near with confidence. The word for "draw near" (Heb. 4:16, RSV) is "a sacerdotal word" and brings to the minds of the Jews the verses in Leviticus 21:17-23<sup>29</sup> (see Chapter II of the present study).

Wuest also uses the pictorial terminology of the Levitical priesthood in discussing Hebrews 4:14-16. He writes:

In Israel, the atonement was not complete at the brazen altar. Not until the high priest had carried the atoning blood into the Holy of holies, and had sprinkled it on the Mercy Seat, was the atonement complete . . . He, glorified High Priest, in His body of flesh and bones but no blood, had to present Himself at the Mercy Seat in Glory in His bloodless body, the evidence that sin had been paid for.<sup>30</sup>

This great High Priest, of whom the Levitical priesthood was but a foreshadow, has made possible man's unhindered access to God. Furthermore, according to Hebrews 4:14-16, He sympathizes with man because of

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. lv.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. lxxvii.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>30</sup>Wuest, Hebrews, pp. 91-92.

man's infirmities, even to the extent of entering into his experience and feeling his heartache Himself.<sup>31</sup>

Conclusion. The concept of infirmities in the Old Testament, as seen in Leviticus 21:16-23, was that of physical imperfections. The priest had to be perfect in order to approach God, i.e., he had to be without bodily imperfections. However, within the Hebrew word for infirmities there lay the possibility of a figurative meaning. This potential became actual in the New Testament Greek word for infirmities, namely, ἁσθένεια. In the New Testament the physical aspect of infirmities was practically ignored and the moral or psychological aspect was emphasized. Infirmities in the New Testament referred to psychological weaknesses which are the source of an unintentional, non-conscious proclivity to sin. Even the priests in the Old Testament were not free from this kind of infirmities; though perfect and free from bodily imperfections, yet they were imperfect in that they were not free of ἁσθένεια.

The present chapter can be summarized with three New Testament verses.<sup>32</sup>

. . . we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens [i.e., He is in the presence of God now in our behalf] . . .

. . . Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many . . .

That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>32</sup>Hebrews 4:14, 9:28, and Matthew 8:17. See also Isaiah 53:4.

These verses provide a threefold meaning of Christ's atonement on the cross. (1) Christ, being the perfect high priest and the perfect sacrifice, has opened the way to God so that man can go to God without a mediator. (2) Christ has carried man's sins with Him, even into the presence of God. (3) Christ has carried man's infirmities with Him into the presence of God. Thus, man's infirmities no longer prevent him from being fit to draw near to God. Indeed, according to Hebrews 4:15, 16, the very fact that man does have infirmities is the reason for his boldness in drawing near to God in order to obtain mercy and the grace he needs in his time of need. Whereas the Old Testament Jew was prevented from entering into the presence of God in the Holy of Holies because of his infirmities, in the New Testament Christ has opened the way for all men to enter God's presence unashamedly with their infirmities.

## CHAPTER IV

### A STUDY OF THE CONCEPT OF INFIRMITIES IN ROMANS 8:26

The concept of infirmities in Leviticus 21:16-23 was that of bodily imperfections. Such infirmities prevented man from entering God's presence. Throughout the Old Testament access to God was conditional, and it was only the high priest who was able to meet these conditions once a year when he entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement.

It was in light of the Levitical concept of infirmities and the priesthood that the writer to the Hebrews introduced an idea of revolutionary proportions. He clearly stated that not only does man have a high priest who has entered into the heavenly Holy of Holies carrying man's sins, but He has also carried with Him man's infirmities. Christ's atonement covers not only the problem of man's sin, but the problem of his infirmities also.

Then comes the message of Paul in Romans 8:26: "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities." Though God now is able to accept man with his infirmities, yet He is not content to leave man to struggle alone with the problem which these infirmities cause. God's intention is to do something helpful to lessen the adverse effects of man's infirmities upon his relationships with Him, with other people, and with himself.

An exegetical study of Romans 8:26. Grammatically there are three independent clauses in Romans 8:26, the first being "Likewise the Spirit helpeth our infirmities." ὡσαύτως means "in the same way, similarly, likewise"<sup>1</sup> and is used to turn the attention of the reader to what has been said in the preceding section (vss. 14-25) concerning "the believer's hope and of the possession of the Spirit as the ground of it."<sup>2</sup> The assistance of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:26) is contemporaneous with the Christians' waiting "for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom. 8:23).

δὲ καὶ means "but also, but even"<sup>3</sup> and turns the attention of the reader to what is to be added to further expand the thought in the previous section. Thus, as man waits out the time until the "redemption of [his body]" (Rom. 8:23), he is "not left alone in [his] hopeful waiting, weak as [he is]."<sup>4</sup>

τὸ πνεῦμα is best translated as "the Spirit," meaning the Holy Spirit. The position that some scholars take, namely that τὸ πνεῦμα refers to the human spirit, "is not in accordance with the view

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<sup>1</sup>William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957), p. 907.

<sup>2</sup>John Knox, The Epistle to the Romans (Vol. IX of The Interpreter's Bible, ed. George Arthur Buttrick. 12 vols.; New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1951), p. 522.

<sup>3</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, op. cit., p. 170.

<sup>4</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1945), p. 545.

of the best modern commentators."<sup>5</sup> Both the best of the modern commentators and the older commentators in general translate these two Greek words as "the Spirit."<sup>6</sup>

συναντιλαμβάνεται is used only here and in Luke 10:40. In Luke 10:40, Martha asked Jesus to have Mary "sunantilambanetai," i.e., to have Mary help her. Martha wanted Mary "to help me by taking hold of the other end of this heavy table and lifting it at the same time with me. The two of us can move it; but it is entirely too heavy for me to manage alone."<sup>7</sup>

συναντιλαμβάνεται is composed of two prepositions and one verb. The verb is "precisely the same verb in precisely the same phrase, which is translated 'took our infirmities,'"<sup>8</sup> in Matthew 8:17, a verse which was referred to in Chapter III of the present study. In that chapter it was noted that in quoting Isaiah 53:4, Matthew was saying that Christ is not only man's sin-bearer, but He is also his infirmity-bearer. Then in Hebrews 4:15, it was seen that Christ carried both man's sins and his infirmities into the heavenly Holy of Holies, into the very presence of God. Now, in Romans 8:26 Paul develops this thought further by using the same simple verb "to take" (λαμβάνω),

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<sup>5</sup>M. B. Riddle, editorial note in J. P. Lange, A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures (Charles Scribner & Company, 1869), V, 276.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Doremus A. Hayes, Greek Culture and the Greek New Testament (New York: Abingdon, 1925), p. 186.

<sup>8</sup>Horace Bushnell, The Vicarious Sacrifice (New York: Charles Scribner & Company, 1866), p. 81.



to which he added two prepositions. In this way Paul is saying that since Christ has "taken" man's infirmities and carried them with Him as man's great High Priest, the Holy Spirit now is able to "take" man's infirmities in a special manner. It is in the meaning of this compound verb that much light is shed on the concept of infirmities in Romans 8:26.

The first part of this compound verb is σὺν . As a preposition it is used with the main verb to complete it or to modify its meaning.<sup>9</sup> It denotes "accompaniment and fellowship . . . a fellowship far closer and more intimate than that expressed by μέτα " and means "to be with one, to be at one's side, to assist one" in the sense of mutual experiencing or participating.<sup>10</sup> This preposition can indicate any kind of union, connection, or participation in a thing.<sup>11</sup> The second preposition, ἀντί , means "over against, opposite."<sup>12</sup> It conveys the idea of two men "carrying a log, one at each end."<sup>13</sup> The addition of these two prepositions to λαμβάνω is used to modify the verb and to denote a special type of "taking hold." Paul is saying that the kind of "taking hold of" or "carrying" that the Holy Spirit does

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<sup>9</sup>A. T. Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1914), p. 828.

<sup>10</sup>Joseph Henry Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (New York: American Book Company, 1889), pp. 598-99.

<sup>11</sup>Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 1690-91.

<sup>12</sup>Thayer, op. cit., p. 49.

<sup>13</sup>Robertson, op. cit., p. 573.

in reference to man's infirmities is not a mere lifting of a burden and carrying it for another. Rather, as Wuest says:

The word speaks of the action of a person coming to another's aid by taking hold over against that person, of the load he is carrying. The person helping does not take the entire load, but helps the other person in his endeavor.<sup>14</sup>

Another writer agrees with Wuest when he comments:

And there is great force in the Greek word συναντιλαμβάνε-  
ται, which means that the Spirit takes on himself a part of  
the burden . . . so that he not only helps and succours us, but  
lifts us up; as though he went under the burden with us.<sup>15</sup>

It is evident from these comments that the Holy Spirit intends to share the burden of man's infirmities "so that He might ease the load [he is] carrying."<sup>16</sup>

Further insight into the relationship of the Holy Spirit to man's infirmities can be gained through a study of the tense, mood, and voice of συναντιλαμβάνε-ται. It is a present indicative middle verb. The present tense conveys the idea of customary action or general truth; this is the gnomic present tense.<sup>17</sup> Thus, it has been, is right now, and will continue to be the Holy Spirit's ministry to "help our infirmities." The present tense of this verb indicates that

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<sup>14</sup>Kenneth S. Wuest, Romans in the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), p. 140.

<sup>15</sup>John Calvin, Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), p. 311.

<sup>16</sup>F. Godet, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956), p. 320.

<sup>17</sup>J. Harold Greenlee, A Concise Exegetical Grammar of New Testament Greek (Third edition; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), p. 53.

the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the area of man's infirmities is to be a continuous, dynamic one.

The indicative mood is the mood of fact.<sup>18</sup> It is enlightening to note the moods that this verb is not. First, it is not the imperative or the mood of command, entreaties, prayers.<sup>19</sup> Man does not have to beg the Holy Spirit to help his infirmities. Rather, it is already a fact that He is, right now, "helping [his] infirmities." Second, it is not the subjunctive or mood of contingency. This mood deals with unrealized possibility, with a futuristic possibility. One cannot answer yes or no as to whether it has happened.<sup>20</sup> Man does not have to wonder whether or not, sometime in the future, the Holy Spirit will maybe come to his rescue and "help [his] infirmities." Paul stated simply that the Holy Spirit has already come to man's aid. Third, it is not the optative or mood of hope.<sup>21</sup> Man does not merely hope that the Holy Spirit can do something for his infirmities for he knows it to be a fact that indeed the Holy Spirit has come to "help [his] infirmities."

The middle voice calls special attention to the subject of the sentence. Robertson said that:

In the active voice the subject is merely acting; in the middle the subject is acting in relation to himself somehow. What this precise relation is the middle voice does not say. That must come out of the context or the significance of the verb itself.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>22</sup>Robertson, Grammar, p. 804.

This is "the voice of personal interest somewhat like the dative case."<sup>23</sup> The *συν* in *συναντιλαμβάνεται* also takes the dative,<sup>24</sup> thus strengthening the force of the middle voice and emphasizing the personal involvement of the Holy Spirit with man and with his infirmities.

*ἀσθένεια* is the same word as the one found in the passages in the Epistle to the Hebrews which were studied in Chapter III. In that chapter it was seen that the New Testament concept of infirmities has to do with man's inner spirit and its weaknesses and imperfections. Though not sin in themselves, these infirmities are the source of an unintentional, non-conscious proclivity to sin. They hinder the Christian in his attempt to become more and more Christlike. They are a "coming short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Thus, though a man can have access to God in spite of his infirmities, yet his infirmities do adversely affect his relationship to God. Therefore, it is God's intention to do something helpful for man at the point of his infirmities.

The opposite of the "infirmities of the flesh" is the "power of the Spirit" which "helps [man's] infirmities." "Yet *ἀσθένεια* is not merely the opposite pole but in the Christian sphere can also be the place where the divine *δύναμις* [i.e., power] is revealed

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 806.

<sup>24</sup>Greenlee, op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>25</sup>Gustav Stahlin, "*ἀσθενής, ἀσθένεια, ἀσθενέω, ἀσθένημα*," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Gerhard Kittel, editor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 492.

on earth."<sup>25</sup> II Corinthians 12:9,10, and 4:7 support this statement as does Romans 8:26.

In Romans 8:26 τῇ ἀσθένειᾳ is used as a completer of the thought of συναντιλαμβάνεται, describing what it is that the Spirit "helps." It is in the dative case, indicating the idea of personal interest. "The accusative, genitive, and dative are all cases of inner relations, but the dative has a distinctive personal touch not true of the others."<sup>26</sup> Again it is seen how closely the Holy Spirit identifies with man and his infirmities.

In some Greek texts the word for infirmities is in the plural and in some it is in the singular. In the plural it "is expressive of extremity."<sup>27</sup> In the singular it "indicates a general condition of weakness."<sup>28</sup> Therefore, whichever text one chooses to adhere to, the idea is still pluralistic. It is one of those words which contains the idea of the plural even in its singular form.

The second independent clause is "for we know not what we should pray for as we ought." It begins with τό which is used to introduce the indirect question and is not translated.<sup>29</sup> This question is the object of the negated verb οὐκ οἶδμεν<sup>30</sup> and indicates what it is the "we do not know." γάρ means "for."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Robertson, Grammar, p. 536.

<sup>27</sup>Calvin, Romans, p. 311.

<sup>28</sup>W. E. Vine, The Epistle to the Romans (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1948), p. 127.

<sup>29</sup>Thayer, Lexicon, p. 436.

<sup>30</sup>Lenski, Romans, p. 545.

<sup>31</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, Lexicon, p. 151.

τίς is an interrogative pronoun used as the object of προσευξώμεθα. Since it does not have an antecedent, it is translated simply as the indirect question "what?".<sup>32</sup> προσευξώμεθα means "to pray" and is "always used of prayer to the gods or to God."<sup>33</sup> It is used here in the subjunctive mood, which is the mood of unrealized possibility. It indicates a deliberative question that deals with what is desirable, possible or necessary.<sup>34</sup> Thus, it might be translated "what it is desirable for us to pray for" or "what it is possible for us to pray for" or even "what it is necessary for us to pray for." καθό means "as."<sup>35</sup> δεῖ denotes any kind of necessity<sup>36</sup> or compulsion.<sup>37</sup> It can be translated "it is necessary, one must or has to, one ought to or should."<sup>38</sup> In Romans 8:26 it seems to be used "of an inner necessity, growing out of a given situation."<sup>39</sup> Denney says that together καθὸ δεῖ mean "according as the need is at the moment; we know the end, which is common to all prayers, but not what is necessary at each crisis of need in order to enable us to attain

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 826.

<sup>33</sup>James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), p. 547.

<sup>34</sup>Greenlee, Grammar, pp. 50-51.

<sup>35</sup>Thayer, op. cit., p. 314.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>37</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, op. cit., p. 171.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

this end."<sup>40</sup> οὐκ negates the main verb, οἶδαμεν, which means "to know, understand."<sup>41</sup> Though in the perfect tense, "it has the signification of a present."<sup>42</sup>

The final independent clause is "but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." ἀλλά is an "adversative particle indicating a difference with or contrast to what precedes, in the case of individual clauses as well as whole sentences."<sup>43</sup> It can be used to indicate "a transition to someth[ing] different or contrasted,"<sup>44</sup> and to take back or limit a preceding statement.<sup>45</sup> It is translated as "but, yet, nevertheless."<sup>46</sup> αὐτό is an intensive personal pronoun used in apposition to τὸ πνεῦμα . Since the Greek word for "Spirit" is in the neuter gender, the pronoun here has to be in the neuter gender also. This is the reason for the Authorized Version translation of αὐτό as "itself" rather than the more correct "himself" which is found in the more recent translations. τὸ πνεῦμα refers to the Holy Spirit as it does earlier in this verse. ὑπερεντύγχαλει, which is translated "maketh intercession," is used only in this verse in the New Testament. However, the main verb itself, used without the preposition, can be found several

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<sup>40</sup>James Denney, St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Vol. II of The Expositor's Greek Testament, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll. 5 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), p. 651.

<sup>41</sup>Thayer, Lexicon, p. 174.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, Lexicon, p. 37.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

times in the New Testament.<sup>47</sup> "It means properly to be present with anyone for the purpose of aiding, as an advocate does in a court of justice; hence to intercede for anyone, or to aid or assist in any manner."<sup>48</sup> In John 14:16,17,26, Christ refers to the Holy Spirit as *παράκλητος*, as the "one who appears in another's behalf, mediator, intercessor, helper, the one called alongside of."<sup>49</sup> Wuest says that *ὑπερεντυχάει* "is used of one who happens upon one who is in trouble and pleads in that one's behalf."<sup>50</sup> *στεναγμοῖς* means "sigh, groan."<sup>51</sup> Being in the dative case, it could be a dative of instrument or means or a dative of reference.<sup>52</sup> It could be translated, therefore, as "the Holy Spirit intercedes for us by means of or through unuttered sighs" or as "He intercedes for us with reference to unuttered sighs." The context is not clear as to whether the unuttered sighs are man's or those of the Spirit. In light of verse 23 where man sighs as he waits for the redemption of his body and of verse 26 where he is burdened down by his infirmities, it seems best to the present writer to understand *στεναγμοῖς* as meaning man's unuttered

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<sup>47</sup>Albert Barnes, Notes on the New Testament: Romans (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1949), p. 195.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, Lexicon, p. 623.

<sup>50</sup>Kenneth S. Wuest, Golden Nuggets From the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), p. 99.

<sup>51</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, op. cit., p. 773.

<sup>52</sup>Greenlee, Grammar, pp. 31-32.



sighs and groanings. Therefore, it can be said that the Spirit intercedes by using man's unuttered sighs (dative of means) or that He intercedes by taking notice of man's unuttered sighs (dative of reference). The adjective ἀλαλήτοις modifies στεναγμοῖς and means "wordless, too deep for words, inexpressible."<sup>53</sup> The burden of man's infirmities is so great and the crushing weight of them causes such deep hurt that man is lost for words when trying to verbalize his agony. Barnes explains the meaning of this final clause in this way:

With sighs, or that deep feeling and intense anxiety which exists in the oppressed and burdened heart of the Chr[istian] . . . which is not uttered; those emotions which are too deep for utterance, or for expression in articulate language. This does not mean the Spirit produces these groanings; but that in these deep-felt emotions, when the soul is oppressed and overwhelmed, he lends his assistance and sustains us.<sup>54</sup>

One of the best translation of Romans 8:26 is that of Sanday in The International Critical Commentary.

Nor are we alone in our struggles. The Holy Spirit supports our helplessness. Left to ourselves we do not know what prayers to offer or how to offer them. But in those inarticulate groans which rise from the depths of our being, we recognize the voice of none other than the Holy Spirit. He makes intercession.<sup>55</sup>

Romans 8:26 as discussed by commentators. There is widespread disagreement among commentators as to the meaning of Romans 8:26 and 27.

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<sup>53</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>54</sup>Barnes, op. cit., p. 195.

<sup>55</sup>William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (in The International Critical Commentary, ed. S. R. Driver, A. Plummer, and C. A. Briggs. Fifth edition; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), p. 212.

It is not within the scope of the present study to discuss the varying views of these commentators. However, the main differences need to be noted. These are: (1) Does τὸ πνεῦμα refer to the Holy Spirit or to the human spirit? (2) Does ἀσθένεια refer only to man's lack of knowledge as to how to pray or to man's weaknesses in general? (3) Is it the form or the content of prayer of which man is ignorant? (4) Does στεναγμοῖς refer to man or to the Holy Spirit? Perhaps these differences are indicative of the fact that the exegetes still do not have a complete understanding of what Romans 8:26 means and that extra-biblical disciplines, such as psychology, may be needed in order to understand more fully the meaning of this great verse.

Intermixed with the varying and contradictory exegetical and explanatory material in commentaries, however, there seems to be an indication as to the direction future scholarship ought to take in regard to this verse. Perhaps one of the most important comments along this line was made by Denney in The Expositor's Greek Testament when he said that "the weakness which the Spirit helps is that due to our ignorance."<sup>56</sup> The questions that need to be asked in light of this statement are: "What exactly is the nature of man's ignorance?" and "What is the cause of man's ignorance?". The comments of other commentators may help to shed light on these two questions.

Beet said that man groans because he is conscious of his being in need, but because of his infirmities "[he does] not know how to ask

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<sup>56</sup>Denney, Romans, p. 651.

so that [his] prayers may correspond with [his] real need."<sup>57</sup> Moule indicated that man's ignorance is due to his "shortness and bewilderment of insight,"<sup>58</sup> i.e., his *ασθένεια*. Godbey agreed when he said: "we are so encumbered with infirmities of thought, speech, and action that we would be in a deplorable condition were it not for the timely aid of the Holy Spirit."<sup>59</sup> Man is aware of his conscious thinking, speaking, and acting, but the Holy Spirit's understanding of man goes beyond the level of man's conscious awareness. The depths of a man are open to the Holy Spirit.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit to the Christian, therefore, "is in us and it is to help. It is God sharing our burdens. It is God taking hold of our problems. It is God strengthening us in our weakness. Yes, it is God helping."<sup>60</sup> In other words, it is God working in man's inner spirit, in that part of man to which he himself does not have immediate access. God's grace operates in "the inner world of our emotions"<sup>61</sup> according to Romans 8:26 and in "the outer world of

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<sup>57</sup>Joseph Agar Beet, A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Tenth edition; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1902), p. 239.

<sup>58</sup>Handley C. G. Moule, The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans (in The Expositor's Bible, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll. Fourth edition; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1888), p. 233.

<sup>59</sup>W. B. Godbey, Commentary on the New Testament (Cincinnati: Revivalist Office, 1899), V, 140.

<sup>60</sup>Roy L. Laurin, Life Begins (Chicago: Van Kampen Press, 1948), p. 310.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 309.

events"<sup>62</sup> according to Romans 8:28. The inner world of the Christian contains "emotions which are too deep for utterance" and "deep-felt emotions [which are experienced] when the soul is oppressed and overwhelmed."<sup>63</sup> The Holy Spirit "takes the man in his bewilderment, when troubles from without press him, and fears from within make him groan, and he is in sore need, yet at a loss for the right cry."<sup>64</sup>

Because "there is no depth of personality whither He will not come,"<sup>65</sup> the Holy Spirit is able to uncover "all the deep and hidden needs"<sup>66</sup> of the Christian. Moreover, He "not only knows our inner condition but is most deeply concerned about it."<sup>67</sup> It is the sighs and groans that are "locked in our hearts . . . these deeper ones that remain in our spirit . . . even these, since they are the deepest of all, [that] the Holy Spirit utilizes in making his great and effective intercession for us."<sup>68</sup>

"Every ache and pain is a part of the penalty of death, destroying the vitality of the body";<sup>69</sup> and when the ache and pain are in the realm of man's inner spirit, they destroy the vitality of his emotional life and of his personality. "Our minds are more disturbed and confused

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid.    <sup>63</sup>Barnes, Romans, p. 195.    <sup>64</sup>Moule, op. cit., p. 232.

<sup>65</sup>Dean Puget quoted in James Comper Gray and George M. Adams, Gray and Adams' Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), V, 50.

<sup>66</sup>James Hastings (ed.), The Great Texts of the Bible (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), XIV, 76.

<sup>67</sup>Lenski, Romans, p. 547.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 548.

<sup>69</sup>Benjamin Helm, A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Louisville, Ky.: Pentecostal Publishing Company, 1907), p. 263.

than that they can rightly choose what is meet and expedient . . . our thoughts . . . continue oppressed with darkness."<sup>70</sup> It is then, when one is unable to utter anything, that "God Who is greater than our hearts [and Who] understands us perfectly"<sup>71</sup> listens to the Holy Spirit as He intercedes for him.

Helm wrote that, since death is a result of sin, we might expect the second Adam in undertaking our redemption to make provision for our deliverance from it. . . . Since sin and death bring pain and sickness, He provides relief and healing. . . . The atonement of Christ covers man's sickness.<sup>72</sup>

He further amplified this fact when he wrote:

If Christ bore our sins, we need not bear them. By faith we get rid of them. So too we may lay our sicknesses by faith upon Him who took them, and He will heal us by His Spirit, just as he delivers the soul from the dominion of sin when we seek it in faith. Whatever God included in the atonement for us, we can obtain through faith. . . . With God, the forgiveness of sins and healing of diseases go hand and hand.<sup>73</sup>

In Psalm 103:3 (in the Revised Standard Version) there is a couplet which describes God as the one "who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases." Evidently "there is a deeper connexion than we can yet analyse between sin, the primal and central evil, and everything that is really wreck or pain."<sup>74</sup> The "pain" caused by man's infirmities is just as real and intense as the pain caused by physical suffering,

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<sup>70</sup>Calvin, Romans, p. 312.

<sup>71</sup>W. H. Griffith Thomas, St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), p. 224.

<sup>72</sup>Helm, op. cit., pp. 263-64.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., pp. 265-66.

<sup>74</sup>Moule, Romans, p. 228.

and God is just as concerned about healing the one as He is about healing the other. This is the message of Romans 8:26.

The relationship of Leviticus 21:16-23 and Hebrews 5:2, 7:28, and 4:15 to Romans 8:26. In Leviticus 21:16-23 the concept of infirmities is that of physical defects. Such infirmities hindered a man of the priestly family from entering the presence of God in the Holy of Holies. Access to God was hindered by physical infirmities and imperfections.

The writer to the Hebrews takes the biblical concept of infirmities a step further and says that although the priests were without physical infirmities, yet they did have another kind of imperfection, namely ἀσθένεια. Then the expected Messiah appeared and became the great High Priest. He had no infirmities and therefore was not hampered in His access to God. But more than this, He made a way for man to draw close to God in spite of his infirmities because He carried both man's sins and his infirmities with Him to the cross and into the heavenly Holy of Holies.

However, since man's infirmities constitute a spiritual drag<sup>75</sup> and are "hindrances and blocks and drags to the perfect expression of the love of God,"<sup>76</sup> it is God's intention to do something helpful for man at the point of his infirmities. This is the message of Paul in Romans 8:26. "How glad we should be that our great High Priest . . .

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<sup>75</sup>W. Curry Mavis, The Psychology of Christian Experience (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963), p. 59.

<sup>76</sup>Clyde E. Van Valin, "The Holy Spirit--Your Helper" (Wilmore, Ky., May 21, 1967). (Tape Recording.)

is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and in the gift of the Holy Spirit has made adequate provision for every drawback to which we are subject!"<sup>77</sup> Mavis further explained Paul's message in this manner:

The sincere person on the Christian quest becomes confused and disillusioned when he fails to recognize that the Holy Spirit does not cleanse away, like a great divine psychiatrist, all the emotional complexes, defense mechanisms, anxieties, and other ineffective psychological processes when He fills the human heart with His sanctifying presence. Paul recognized that many of the psychic processes remain in the heart after the filling of the Spirit. After describing personal freedom from the "law of sin and death" in Romans 8, he says, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities" (Romans 8:26a). The Holy Spirit employs a different kind of divine therapy in resolving the acquired tendencies to wrongdoing. He does not remove all of them by an act of cleansing, but rather He helps believers to gain insight into their maladjustments and to resolve them by His strengthening presence.<sup>78</sup>

Another author agreed with Mavis when he said:

And I think what Paul is really saying is that if we will let the Holy Spirit have us and indwell us, though He may not be able to heal all these emotions and solve all the inferiority complexes and patch up all the holes in the roof of our personality, yet He is able to so magnify the love of God through those very problems that the ultimate praise and honor and glory will go to God and not to us.<sup>79</sup>

Since the great High Priest has carried man's infirmities (Matt. 8:17) and has entered into the heavenly Holy of Holies (Heb. 4:14), and since He is touched with the feeling of man's infirmities (Heb. 4:15) to the extent that He has sent His Holy Spirit to help man (Rom. 8:26), therefore man can approach God boldly when he is in need (Heb. 4:16). The Holy Spirit has been sent as a helper and His "primary goal and

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<sup>77</sup>J. Oswald Sanders, A Spiritual Clinic (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), p. 71.

<sup>78</sup>Mavis, op. cit., p. 63.

<sup>79</sup>Van Valin, loc. cit.

ministry to us is the enlargement, the explanation, the internalizing of all that Christ had done through His redemptive work on the cross and through His resurrection power."<sup>80</sup>

Conclusion. The concept of infirmities in Romans 8:26 is an extension of that in Hebrews 5:2, 7:28, and 4:15. While the passages in Hebrews establish the fact that man does have infirmities and that Christ is concerned about them, this verse in Romans indicates how Christ is going to deal with these infirmities.

An exegetical study of Romans 8:26 indicates that the Holy Spirit is intimately involved with man at the point of his infirmities. He comes alongside of man to participate with him in the bearing of the burdens caused by his infirmities. He feels along with man the pressure and pain he experiences as he wrestles with his inner problems. But more than this, the Spirit understands what is behind man's sighs and groans which remain locked in his heart, too deep for him to know how to express his agony in words. Because He has access to the depths of man's inner spirit, where the real source of his problems lies, the Holy Spirit is able to intercede in man's behalf.

A study of what commentators have said about this verse also indicates that God is concerned with the problems hidden deep within man's inner spirit. In reference to *ἀσθένεια*, these writers used such words as "the inner world of emotions," "our shortness and

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid.



bewilderment of insight," "the deep and hidden needs," "deep-felt emotions," "fears from within," and "burdens, problems, struggles." These terms and other are concepts with which psychology is quite familiar. It is not surprising then to find a Christian psychologist using Romans 8:26 to describe the "divine therapy" of the Holy Spirit.<sup>81</sup>

Therefore, though man is not prevented from drawing close to God because of his infirmities, yet he is hindered in his attempts to please God and to fully express His love in his daily life because of his infirmities. For this reason the Holy Spirit has been sent to deal with man's inner impediments and thereby to help him to glorify God more fully.

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<sup>81</sup>Mavis, Psychology, p. 63.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The biblical concept of infirmities has been studied in passages from Leviticus, Hebrews, and Romans. Each succeeding passage has built upon the one that preceded it and has contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the concept of infirmities in the Bible.

In Leviticus 21:16-23 it was discovered that any imperfection was a barrier that prevented man from having access to God. However, since at that time in history man did not think in abstract terms, he understood spiritual concepts in terms which were physical and concrete. Because of this inability to grasp abstract ideas, the Hebrew word for infirmities refers to physical imperfections. If a man of the priestly family was free of physical defects, he was qualified to serve as a mediator for the people in their religious rituals.

Hebrews 5:2 and 7:28 indicate that though the priests in the Old Testament were without physical infirmities, yet there was another kind of infirmity to which all men are subjected, including the priests. Hebrews 4:15 speaks of one priest, however, who had neither physical infirmities nor the kind of infirmities that all men have, namely ἁσθένεια. This priest was the Messiah, the Savior, who also became the great High Priest. Without infirmities Himself He had unhindered access to God and as He entered the heavenly Holy of Holies He carried both man's sins and his infirmities into the presence of

God. Now man can boldly approach God when he is in need because his infirmities no longer hinder him from having access to God.

In these passages in Hebrews and in Romans 8:26, the word for infirmities is ἀσθενεια. Originally the meaning of this word was similar to the Hebrew word in Leviticus 21:16-23 (אֵיִם). However, in the New Testament it rarely refers to physical infirmities. Rather, these are infirmities of the inner spirit of man, of the emotional or psychological area of his life. They are the source of both conscious and non-conscious motivation to sin. Therefore, they adversely affect man's relationship with God and his attempt to express the love of God in his daily life.

According to Romans 8:26 God has not left man alone to struggle along as best he can; His intention is to do something to lessen the hampering effects of man's infirmities. For this reason God has given man His Holy Spirit whose ministry in man is at the point of his infirmities. The Spirit has been sent to make actual and internal in man all that Christ accomplished in His atonement and His resurrection.

Conclusion. It may be concluded from the evidence discussed in the preceding chapters that the Scriptures indicate that the atonement of Christ has provided the answer to all of man's needs. For man's sin problem, Christ has provided the means for his forgiveness. For man's inner, emotional needs, Christ has provided for his acceptance by God in spite of his infirmities and has sent His Spirit to "help" his infirmities.

However, on the basis of this research, the present writer concludes that to understand how it is that the Spirit helps man's infirmities and to know more about the nature of these infirmities and their influence on man's attempts to live a holy life, one needs the benefits of contemporary psychological insights into human personality. The Scriptures have given assurance that all of man's needs, including his psychological infirmities, are of concern to God and that He wants to do something to help man. More than that, He has already done this very thing through the atonement and resurrection of Christ and through the sending of the Holy Spirit to make real and actual in man all that Christ has made possible.

Out of the present study comes the conviction that the biblical concept of infirmities may be closely related to the psychological concept of the non-conscious part of man's personality. The usual psychological terminology for this concept is "subconscious" and "unconscious." The present writer feels that man's infirmities lie, to a great extent, in this level of his being which is beyond his immediate conscious recall. Moreover, the Christian's problems in knowing what to pray for are due to his lack of knowledge of what is in the non-conscious part of his personality. Romans 8:26 gives the Christian great hope, however, for the Holy Spirit has access to this part of him and is able to help and heal at this level of his personality.

Suggestions for further study. The present study has raised many questions and revealed numerous areas for further study. It is only a beginning and perhaps has created more questions than it answers.

The main question arising out of the present study is: What can modern psychology contribute to the Christian's understanding of the ministry of the Holy Spirit within him? The concept of the subconscious and unconscious, or simply the non-conscious as differentiated from the conscious, may prove to be quite helpful in gaining a fuller understanding of Romans 8:26 and the work of the Spirit in the depths of man's inner spirit. Also, a study of the biblical concept of the non-conscious would seem to be a logical followup of the present study and would contribute to the biblical basis for a psychology of Christian experience.

Another area of study which would aid the Christian in his understanding of the ministry of the Holy Spirit to his personality could be an investigation of contemporary psychologists and their approach to the human situation. Among such social scientists are Paul Tournier, William Glasser, O. Hobart Mowrer, Sydney Jourard, Cecil Osborne, Earl Jabay, Karen Horney, Agnes Sanford, John Drakeford, Hugh Missildine, and Harry Guntrip.

Among the questions that have come to mind and which have been answered in only a small way, if at all, are these. (1) What do the Bible and human experience say about what God can do in the inner spirit of man? (2) Does the Holy Spirit have access to the part of man that is non-conscious? If so, how and with what results? (3) If modern psychology says that part of man's infirmities is his subconscious and unconscious mind, then what biblical evidence is there that spiritual resources are available to operate in that area? Each of these questions provides an area for future study.

Another approach to the continuance of the present study is to examine Romans 8:26 in the context of the entire eighth chapter of Romans. In this way some answers might be found to some of the problems with which Christians are struggling. Such problems are expressed in the following statements made by Christians recently. (1) "There's something about myself that I do not completely understand. I do not understand totally why it is that I am not able completely to glorify God in all that I do." (2) "I do not understand why I am still suffering, wrestling, groaning. What is causing this trouble and distress and how can I find release from it?" (3) "That which I do not know about myself is a problem-producing ignorance. It is dynamic and causes me to be less of a person, less of a Christian than I ought to be and want to be. Is there any help for me in this area of my Christian experience?" (4) "Since I am not able to fully comprehend all the ramifications of my present problem and distress, I do not know how to pray about it. Even the help of fellow Christians stops short of giving me insight as to what my real problem is. When I can only sigh and groan within myself, is there anything the Holy Spirit can do to help me?"

Since the emphasis of the Gospel is love for God, for one's fellow man, and for one's self, a study needs to be made also of the relationship of man's infirmities to his ability, or inability, to love. Here again the insights of modern psychology into the dynamics of human personality can help the Christian understand the impediments that hinder him from loving and can help him learn how to deal with these hindrances.

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